



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS 1960'S JAPANESE GANGSTER MOVIES BY LITTLE-KNOWN ACTION DIRECTOR

Seijun Suzuki: Cinema with a Vengeance

Wednesday evenings, March 1 - 29, 1995. Admission \$4, CMA members \$3.

Filmmaker Seijun Suzuki (b. 1923) represents one of the West's real blind spots in its knowledge and understanding of Japanese cinema, a situation to be remedied in Cleveland on five Wednesdays in March as The Cleveland Museum of Art offers the film series, **Seijun Suzuki: Cinema with a Vengeance**. While the mention of Japanese cinema may prompt audiences to think of the serenity of Ozu, the elegance of Mizoguchi, or the grand sweep of Kurosawa, Suzuki worked in the gritty, flashy world of the Japanese action picture, cranking out low-budget quickies for the slightly disreputable Nikkatsu Studio.

Suzuki specialized in *yakuza* (Japanese gangster) pictures and sensational literary adaptations, but he stamped his films with a bold and innovative visual style that transcends content. His preferred format was widescreen scope, which enhanced his baroque excesses of blinding light, gaudy color and 1960s pop-art design. His camera wouldn't sit still, swooping from room to room, following his sleazy characters. One critic called him "The Anti-Ozu." On a mission "to keep the audience from getting bored," Suzuki moved further and further into pure style, lampooning the *yazuka* genre. Eventually he started sacrificing logic to theatrics: a sword stroke turned white snow red, lightning and gusts of wind erupted out of nowhere, the four seasons became scrambled. In *Branded To Kill* (1967), Suzuki went too far; in one standout visual adventure, he mischievously preempted the censors by slapping his own animated masks over certain images, making the masks a graphic element in their own right. Nikkatsu fired him for making "incomprehensible" movies, provoking radical students to picket the studio.

This series consists of five of Suzuki's greatest 60s films, all in scope prints. Two more of his best films, *Gate of Flesh* (1964) and *Tokyo Drifter* (1966), will show on March 4 & 5 at the Cleveland Cinematheque, tel. 421-7450. This series, organized by the Pacific Film Archive, is presented through the cooperation of the Japan Foundation and Nikkatsu Films.

Film details next page

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Wednesday/1 March, 7:30 pm *Youth of the Beast*, Japan, 1963, color, scope, subtitles, 91 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. Hyperbolic *yakuza* thriller was Suzuki's breakthrough film; a man infiltrates two rival Tokyo gangs and pits them against each other. "You'll need to sit well back from the startling visuals, the outré designs and the florid action." -Tony Rayns.

Wednesday/8 March, 7:30 pm *Branded To Kill*, Japan, 1967, b&w, scope, subtitles, 91 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. The film that got Suzuki fired from Nikkatsu Studio, a flamboyant and outrageous *yakuza* thriller about the Tokyo underworld's "Number Three Killer."

Wednesday/15 March, 7:30 pm *Kanto Wanderer*, Japan, 1963, color, scope, subtitles, 93 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. Visually dazzling *yakuza* thriller about two lovesick killers who rebel against their own gangs.

Wednesday/22 March, 7:30 pm *Story of a Prostitute*, Japan, 1965, b&w, scope, subtitles, 96 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. Unflinching account of a prostitute hired to service Japanese troops in 1937 Manchuria.

Wednesday/29 March, 7:30 pm *Fighting Elegy*, Japan, 1966, b&w, scope, subtitles, 86 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. A high school student in 1935 Japan turns to fighting when he is unable to express his feelings for a virginal young girl. Suzuki in a more realistic vein, but no less effective.

The following two Suzuki movies will be shown at the Cleveland Cinematheque, Cleveland Institute of Art, 11141 East Boulevard, tel. 421-7450. Admission \$5.

Saturday/March 4, 9:45 pm *Gate of Flesh*, Japan, 1964, color, scope, subtitles, 90 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. Lurid tale of prostitutes and black marketeers in the bombed-out slums of postwar Tokyo. Adults only.

Sunday/March 5, 7:00 pm *Tokyo Drifter*, Japan, 1966, scope, subtitles, 83 min. Directed by Seijun Suzuki. Dazzling, unbridled account of a lone *yakuza* caught up in gang warfare. Print courtesy of Contemporary Arts, London.